

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Motoe Nihei, 74, retired Dole Company (Hawaiian Pine Company) field forelady

Motoe (Sato) Nihei, Japanese, was born in Iwate-ken, Japan on December 10, 1904. When she was nine years old, her family immigrated to Kipahulu, Maui where her father was a Japanese school teacher, and her mother worked in the plantation store.

In 1925, after her mother passed away, Mrs. Nihei and her father and brother moved to Molokai where she worked briefly as a sales clerk at Kanemitsu Store in Kaunakakai. The following year, she married Shinkichi Nihei, an independent pineapple grower. The Depression caused them to give up pineapple growing and switch to gardening. Between 1927 and 1937, she gave birth to her six children.

A desire to return to pineapple was the reason the Niheis left Molokai for Wahiawa in 1937. They were assigned to Hawaiian Pine Company's Kaukonahua Camp. She began working in the pineapple fields that same year doing hoe-hana, picking slips and suckers, cutting crowns from the fruit and packing the fruit in boxes, and picking fruit with canvas sacks. She became a temporary gang luna during the peak season.

When not working in the fields during the off season, Mrs. Nihei did laundry for the single Filipino workers. For this, she collected \$2 per month from each worker.

Mrs. Nihei retired from the fields in 1963. She resides in Wahiawa with her husband and daughter, and is presently a member of the Wahiawa Rainbow Senior Citizens Club, and the Ko-Ju Club. Her hobbies include handicraft, gardening and crocheting.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Motoe Nihei (MN)

February 23, 1979

Wahiawa, Oahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mrs. Motoe Nihei. Today is February 23, 1979, and we are at her home in Wahiawa.

Mrs. Nihei, can you tell me when your parents came to Maui from Japan?

MN: You mean my father? My father, he first came to Maui, was....way back, you know. When I was four years old, so that means 1908, I think.

WN: So you were born in 1904. So about 1908. And I see that your mother came later on, in 1913. Why is it that your father came earlier?

MN: Well, it's just like the immigrants, eh, before. You stay in Japan is hard to make a living so with his cousin they talk about it, [they] say, "Well, let's go to Hawaii. People all going and we can make some money." They came but it was not like what they think in Japan. They still had a hard life. But in 1911 and 1912, my grandmother and my grandfather, both of them passed away. So like Japanese--he's the oldest son--he had to go back [to Japan], fix up all the houses and everything. And then my mother and I came together with my father [in 1913].

WN: What type of work did your father do?

MN: Oh, he was teaching Japanese School at Kipahulu [Maui].

WN: Did he ever work in the fields?

MN: No, no, he didn't work in the fields.

WN: Was this his own Japanese School?

MN: No, no, it's by the community, Kipahulu.

WN: So he came to Hawaii, his only purpose was to teach in Japanese School?

MN: No, I think that was not. I think he had some kind of other thinking, but I don't know sure about that.

WN: Did your mother work?

MN: No, she didn't. She help at home, she went to this tailor shop to learn sewing, she used to go work over there [at the plantation store].

WN: Did your mother work all day?

MN: No, just part-time. She got paid by pieces. She sew one, about 10 cents or 15 cents, those days, I think.

WN: How did your father feel about your mother working?

MN: Well, I think those days, he didn't feel anything. Just make money better. (Laughs) But not many, not much.

WN: Your father moved from Maui to Molokai in 1925; why did he move?

MN: Because where we stayed, Kaupakulua [they moved from Kipahulu to Kaupakulua, Maui, in 1917], that's all [independent] pineapple growers around there. And those pineapple growers, they had really hard time and they started moving out to the plantation. So the [number of] children--my father was teaching Japanese School--[was getting] less [and] less every month. That last was, I think, about only 20 [children]. We couldn't make living with that. So by the time my mother passed away, well, I think he feels something change in his life. His friend told him, "Let's go Molokai and settle up Japanese School. There's no Japanese School there."

And so he says, "Well, let's go, then." So we moved to Molokai.

WN: So you, your brother, and your father moved to Molokai in 1925. Did he know that he was going to be working in the pineapple fields?

MN: My father, no, no. He never work in the fields.

WN: You said that you left school in the eighth grade, at Kaupakulua; why did you leave school?

MN: Well, that school was only till eighth. And my mother passed away just one or two years later. And between that, those days not like now--no cars, no transportation to go other schools, too far. And they (my father) tell me, "Well, girls, eighth grade enough. Stay home."

WN: What about your brother?

MN: After I got married, my father and my brother, they moved to Honolulu. My brother, he graduated McKinley and he's okay. (My father

was unable to set up a Japanese School on Molokai because there were so few Japanese, so he left for Honolulu after I got married.)

WN: So you got married in 1926 on Molokai. How did you meet your husband?

MN: Just like olden days, some people get go-between together. They say, "How about that? You don't want that guy?"

And this guy says, "Oh, you don't want him?"

And that's how we met. Yeah.

WN: When you first got to Molokai did you start working in the pine fields right away?

MN: No, I didn't. I didn't work right away, though. (When we first came to Molokai, we went to Kaunakakai, where I worked at Kanemitsu Store as a salesgirl for six or seven months.) I married January-- and you know, the pineapple [starts] is about May. Well, so busy. I know how it works because I lived in Kaupakulua [Maui], the pineapple, the plantation, so I know how they work. So I said, "Well, since I don't have any children, I think I going have to. With my sister-in-law.

WN: How did your father feel about you working in the fields?

MN: He didn't say anything. He said, "Work is okay. So long you can get it."

WN: Would he have preferred if you worked as a Japanese School teacher?

MN: I don't think so. (Laughs) I don't think so.

WN: After you got married, your husband, I understand, had his own pineapple field. Could you tell me something about that?

MN: The field? Not only my husband, you know. His older brother and his younger brother; three of them, they were partners. They go over together. They made pretty good money.

WN: Did they contract it out, their pine?

MN: Yeah. They contract the pineapple fruits to CPC [California Packing Corporation], Del Monte. That land was owned by Puu o Hoku' Brown Ranch. And those days, we leased from the ranch, and we only send the pineapple to Del Monte. And later, Del Monte leased the land. (I don't remember when Del Monte started leasing the land. Just before the Depression, I think.)

WN: Were these pines shipped anywhere?

MN: Shipped to Honolulu.



WN: All to Honolulu?

MN: Yeah. By barge.

WN: How many people were working on the fields?

MN: In the busy time, during the summer time, we had close to 20 Filipinos. Steady workers, about 10. And busy time, we hire the friends of the working people. They say, "We have good workers so let them try." So we used to have about 20 in the busy time.

WN: Were there other fields like your husband's around that time?

MN: Yeah, there were many over there. We had about how many? I think was 12 or 13 families, all Japanese.

WN: How large was the field?

MN: [At] first, they had about 60 acres. The 60 acres they didn't hire many people. They try hard so they get hard time pay the workers so they try, whatever they can, they try hard. But when I got married [in 1926], the first crop was shipped to Honolulu. They had the money come in so was pretty good. And from that, they start hiring people. (Later, we expanded to over 100 acres.)

WN: How often did you ship out to Honolulu?

MN: We shipped pineapples to Honolulu every other day.

WN: This is during just the peak season?

MN: Yeah, peak season. (During the off season, we would ship only once or twice a week. But sometimes, during the winter months, the Young Brothers barge would come only every two or three months.)

WN: Do you remember what the wages were for the Filipino workers?

MN: We paid about 10 cents or 15 cents higher than CPC. If not, they won't come and work. They rather stay the busy good place.

WN: Did you provide housing for them?

MN: Yeah, housing, too. Food, we order for them. And we pay them not monthly, [but] we pay them when the season ends and the money comes in. We pay them as a lump sum. That way they like it. Take away all the food and whatever we pay them. And when they say they need some money, we give them, and we take away that, [when] we pay them the lump sum. That's why they like it. That way, they can save money.

WN: What about yourself? What kind of work did you do in your fields?

MN: Regular days, I didn't go out to work. Only busy time. Cut the

crowns, pack 'em in the box, that's all we did. With my sister-in-law.

WN: So you just did about everything, then?

MN: Yeah. Oh yeah, and before the planting start, we used to get ready with the shoots. Not like now. Like now, they don't clean the shoots...

WN: You mean the slip?

MN: Yeah (the slips, suckers and crowns). Just they take 'em out, they plant 'em [today]. But olden days, was not. They clean the slips, even the crown, everything they clean. They said if not, the roots not going to come out. (By "cleaning," I mean peeling off the dry leaves at the base of the slip or sucker. Also, the slip has a little nub on the base which we removed. [See drawing of slip in Introduction] Suckers don't have nubs on them.)

WN: Then the Depression came in 1931. What happened then?

MN: The Depression came, was just....we had another new field we leased. Had about 150 acres. And the first crop was coming out. But CPC--Del Monte--says they not going to take the pineapple. Even the company one [the pineapples from Del Monte fields] they not going to take. They said, "Well, this first crop, we're going to pay you," but they said they not going ship to Honolulu. They throw all in the gulch.

So we say, "Well, this way we can't do anything." Del Monte said they want us to go to Kualapuu, the CPC camp. That's in Molokai. That camp is still in Molokai. But my husband says no since we were free workers, he say he don't want to work with a boss on top him. So he said, "Well, if we can stay here, we're going to stay here do some farming."

And so CPC says, "Okay, we'll give you your truck."

[First] they pay all for our working people. Del Monte pay all our working people.

WN: Were the other farms, the same thing happened?

MN: Yeah, all same.

WN: All the private farms in Molokai?

MN: Yeah. Those who were pineapple growers in the Puu o Hoku Ranch--was about 11 or 12 families, I think. Was all the same. Del Monte pay all our working people and besides, we had two tractors, we had about four pair of horses, we gave them all to them. But they said, "We going leave one horse, those plows and everything for farm, and one truck for you folks."

He said, "Oh yeah? Well, okay." The field had about three more years, I think, lease.

They said, "You folks can stay until the three years. Until the lease is expired you can stay here."

So we said, "Well, if that's the case, I think we're going to stay." And we did. We plant tomatoes, potatoes, all kinds.

WN: What became of the large land that CPC owned; they stayed on and continued to grow pine?

MN: Yeah, their own place, that's where they have now, Kualapuu. But they did it real small.

WN: So the lands were reduced?

MN: Yeah, reduced, yeah.

WN: After you lost the land for pine you stayed on the land, and between 1931 and 1934 you started growing fruits and vegetables?

MN: Yeah, fruits and vegetables. Watermelons, all those things. I used to go out with my husband, help him.

WN: And where did you sell the fruit to?

MN: Honolulu. Yeah, we contract to the producer [in] Honolulu. We send to them and every month we order the food, grocery, like that. They send to us.

WN: How was the income there, compared to what you were making in pineapple?

MN: Wasn't so---little. You know how the producers are; like now and olden days is same thing. We send them that much, they don't give you the whole thing. They said, "So many percent spoiled, so many rotten," like that.

WN: So you were doing this from 1934 to 1937?

MN: Yeah, Miyazaki Produce.

WN: Now, you came to Wahiawa in 1937. Why did you come here?

MN: Because we stayed at my sister-in-law house in Damon Tract [Oahu] (for five or six months). And my husband wanted to come back to pineapple, because he knows, he said he has experience in pineapple. And the [Puu o Hoku Brown] Ranch, Mrs. Brown's daughter Alice Brown was working at Del Monte cannery. So one day, my husband went over there [to] see Alice Brown and he talk about how the situation is and he want to get to CPC--Del Monte [in] Kunia.

And Mrs. Brown say, "Yeah, okay. I'll introduce [you] to the boss, so one day you can come down and meet the boss."

So he went to the [DeL Monte] cannery meet the boss. He said, "Okay, go up to Kunia." And that's how we got up.

First, we went to Kunia but he didn't like Kunia so he went Kaukonahua. The field boss over there is [from the] same place in Japan, Fukushima. So he knows him so he says, "Instead of Kunia, why don't you come up here." So we moved to Kaukonahua.

WN: Kaukonahua is Dole. So your husband didn't like Kunia so he decided not to work for CPC. And he decided to go to Kaukonahua, which is Dole.

MN: Yeah.

WN: How were you hired to work?

MN: In the first place, when pineapple season starts they ask who wants to work in the field. Those days was only one month or two months. Real busy season. My mother-in-law, she used to come from Molokai. My husband's oldest brother was in Molokai; he didn't come to Oahu, he stayed there. And my mother-in-law was there. But summer time, she used to come and help us. She said, "Yeah, go work. I'll watch the little kids for you." That's how it happened, I start working.

WN: So your mother-in-law was babysitting your children.

MN: Yeah. Every summer she comes babysit for me.

WN: How long did you work just in the peak seasons, before you started working [as a regular]?

MN: Until 1941; just before the war start. I think 1941, October, I think I got laid off. And the war start December. (I wanted to stay home from work since my son was only four years old. So I didn't work until May of 1942. That's when they had the labor shortage and the company asked me to come out and work. That's when I became a regular.)

WN: Did you have to take any type of test to start work?

MN: Oh yeah, they used to. You have to take physical.

WN: Any other kind of test?

MN: No, no. We used to take that physical, blood test, blood pressure, and just a plain physical. Blood pressure was the most important thing.

WN: Did most women taking the test pass?

MN: Some didn't. Some, they had high blood pressure, some had a bad eye.

WN: Why did you [decide to] go to work?

MN: Because I have six children, with only my husband's income. Those days was just little. So I said, "Well, instead of staying home, I think I better go out and help him and get some spending money for the children." Then would be little easy for us.

WN: What was your first job in the field, when you started in 1937?

MN: Cut the crown and packing [the pineapple in] the box. That's the only job those days.

WN: You cut the crowns off after the men had carried...

MN: Yeah, after the men carried out [to the road], we cut the crown and pack in the box. Grade it number one, number two.

WN: Did you have to grade [size] it yourself?

MN: Yeah, they give you a ring about like that big. Number one and number two. But since you work every day, you can tell. "Oh, this is Grade A [1], this is Grade 2. You can tell already. And once in a while you think, "Oh, which side this goes?" And then you test that [using the rings].

WN: Did they have to train you for anything when you started work?

MN: No. Before the war they didn't train me anything. I look at it, I know that.

WN: When you cut the crowns did you break it off or did you use a knife?

MN: No, with the knife. You hold the pineapple like that, cut it. Two sides.

WN: And you cut the bottom and the top.

MN: Yeah. Bottom has that long leaves like that; they don't want that.

WN: You remember how many other women there were working with you?

MN: In those days, was not many. Let me see....our camp, Kaukonahua Camp, had about six or seven women.

WN: Were they grouped together, doing the same job?

MN: Oh....yeah. But once you go out in the field, we all separated.

WN: Did you work in gangs?

MN: No. Before 1941, no, we didn't work as a gang. We all separated, individual.

WN: What were your hours, before the war?

MN: Was eight hours. Eight hours a day. (My hours never changed all the time I worked pineapple. It was always 6:30 [a.m.] to 3:30 [p.m.]; we had a half-hour lunch.)

WN: Do you remember how much you got paid?

MN: Those days, wages was not much, you know. I think was about dollar ....you work one day, about \$1.10 I think.

WN: Could you go into more detail on that first job you had, cutting off the crowns and putting it in a box?

MN: Cutting off the crown? Oh yeah. The first day I went, I didn't bring water. I didn't know how it's going to be. Because usually, they have a water boy who carries the water. He brings a 5-gallon can, and for one group. And I thought we're going to have water. See, I didn't ask the boss, too. I only had a quart of water for my lunch. And was so hot, I asked the water boy, "Where's the water?"

He said, "The water all gone already."

And was around 1 o'clock [p.m.], I think. I got so dizzy, I couldn't stand any more. So I told my boss--the boss came around on the pick-up--so I said, "I'm going home. I feel like throw out and come sick so I going home."

He scold me, you know. He said, "That's the kind first day. Everybody like that. You stay until 3 o'clock. Then you going get okay."

"No, no. I no can hold. Tomorrow I come, so take me home." That was the first day. (Laughs)

WN: They didn't tell you anything about the water before you started work?

MN: No, he didn't tell me anything.

WN: What did they tell you before you started?

MN: Well, he says, "Bring your own knife with a...." What did he say? "Knife and file."

WN: What was the file for?

MN: For sharpen knife, eh. It gets real dull, you know.

WN: What kind of knife? Any knife at home?

MN: No. Those days, they had a German knife. It's real sharp. I don't see those knives now.

WN: Did you have to buy it?

MN: Yeah, buy your own.

WN: What else did they tell you to bring?

MN: She said, "Don't forget that glove. That's the main thing."

WN: Did the company provide you with anything?

MN: No. Before 1941, they didn't provide anything. Well, if you go to hoe-hana, they provide the hoe. But those days, peak season we no hoe-hana.

WN: What other jobs did you do besides cutting off the crowns?

MN: Before the other job start we were all laid off. Only about....the longest was only about two months. When the pineapple gets low, they all lay off. They said, "Wait for next year." Yeah, that was it.

WN: What about your husband?

MN: Oh, he was steady.

WN: So before the war, the only job you did was cutting the crowns?

MN: Uh huh [yes].

WN: After the war [started], in 1941, when your job became more regular [full time], what kind of jobs did you do?

MN: We went hoeing, cutting the weeds. That was the main one [job]. Then, when the peak season comes, we go out pick pineapple, carry with the bag. After the season's over we pick the slips and the suckers. Ready for the planting.

WN: First, could you describe the hoe-hana?

MN: That was the most easy thing to do. You just go inside the line--- how many row was, those days? Twenty-one rows in one....[block], I think, yeah, 21. [Later corrected to 32.] It's all, and then has the road. First, you go in, you skip one [row] and the next people go in. You leave one row for coming back. So you have to clean this row. And the pineapple is how many, 16 inches between [one row is 16 inches wide], you pick the both sides, half. And coming back, you take that same thing. [Each weeder would take alternate rows, weeding one row going one direction, and the next row coming back the other direction.]







WN: How long does it take you to do one row?

MN: Sometimes, when it's real---everything is ready, you have to go [back] about four, five times to pick one row. (Each row up to the center mark was about 150 feet long.) Some ladies, they go only about not even half, they come back leave all the pineapple behind. So the other guys from the other side [the gang picking on the other side of the center marks], they come in, they get mad because everybody's so tired and hot, you don't want to go across the half way. But still, when you see the pineapple ripe, still you go in and pick it out.

WN: So you carried the canvas over your shoulders?

MN: Yeah, canvas. They provide the canvas. (If you were right-handed, you would grab the first fruit with your right hand and put them in the bag which is slung over your left shoulder.)

WN: How heavy was it? How many pines could you put in one?

MN: Well, 12 used to go in that box. Six on bottom, six on top. But the real big ones, only seven. But usually, when we go in [the women], we had not very big place. So we used to pick 14, 15; carry in the bag come out.

WN: So you carried 14 or 15 in a bag and you filled them in the lug box on the side?

MN: Yeah. You cut the crown and pack in the box.

WN: And someone came to pick the box up?

MN: Yeah, yeah.

WN: So 14, 15 pineapples would be---do you remember how heavy it was?

MN: I just can't explain how heavy it was; it was real heavy. (Laughs)

WN: Were there some ladies who had to carry less?

MN: Yeah, some less. Some, they carry only about four, five. Like our friend, four or five of us, we used to say, "Eh, how many did you carry?"

They say, "Oh, I carry 13."

"Well, let's carry more than that." We used to do that. (Laughs)

WN: Did you ever compete with the men, try to carry as much as the men did?

MN: No, no. You try but you cannot. The men are real smart, they get the technique, I tell you.

WN: Did they ever yell at you or tell you to hurry up?

MN: Oh, the men folks, we're on this side of the [mark], they're on the other side of the [mark] picking the pineapples. When we leave the center place [mark], they yell at us. "Come on, go pick all your pineapple." Sometimes we get so tired, [at] the center part, we pick and throw 'em [the pineapple] on the other side [so that the men would have to carry them out]. They say, "What you doing over there? You pick all your pineapple, you carry all your pineapple." (Laughs) But most was Filipinos. They are real good to us, though.

WN: How about the lunas, were they watching you?

MN: Oh yeah. They watching but they won't say anything. They know how hard the job is. But only when you grade, they tell you to be careful, the Grade A [one] and B [two]. "Be sure not to put the small one in the Grade A [one]."

WN: How about stripping? Can you describe that? Stripping, that's taking the slips off.

MN: Yeah, that was good, you know. We know how large a slip is, we know what is good, what is no good.

WN: They taught you how to tell which kind slip is good?

MN: Yeah. First, they tell you, "Pick about this size, 14 inch. Don't pick the small kind slip."

But was contract [piecework]. They work all contract, thousands, so much we used to [pick].

WN: Do you remember how much you got per slip?

MN: No, they go by thousands. Thousand was about 35 cents. So we we didn't have no time to drink water, we go get 'em.

WN: Did you get paid individual piece work or by groups?

MN: All individual. The luna checks all how much you did.

WN: So of the jobs that you've been describing, which one did women do the most?

MN: The women used to do stripping. Stripping was the most.

(During the war, at Kaukonahua, they used to plant any kind slips. They didn't care what kind they planted. Some were too small, too big, like that. When you plant junk slip, the fruit gets surrounded with too many suckers when it grows. It looked like a bird nest. When there's too many suckers, it's hard to pick the fruit and sometimes the fruit breaks in half when you try to pick it. There should only be about three or four suckers surrounding the fruit. You get

that when you plant the right kind of slip. So, after the war ended, a real strict planting department superintendent came to work. His name was Mr. [Stanley] Christian. He taught everybody how to pick good slips. He said that a good slip is located about one inch from the bottom of the fruit. There are three or four slips there. Those are the good ones. [See diagram of pineapple plant in Introduction.] So after the pineapples were harvested, Mr. Christian made us ladies go and paint an orange mark on each mother plant which had good slips on them. That way, the strippers would know which plants to pick the slips from.)

WN: Which job did you enjoy the most?

MN: I guess stripping was better than the others. (In those days, Kaukonahua was the only planting department. All other camps did harvesting. That's why all the Kaukonahua people did mostly stripping. Only once in a while we went harvesting.)

WN: Did you use a knife to take the slip off or did you just break it off?

MN: You know the slip, with that little ball [on the bottom of the slip], it comes off with the hand. You just go like that [break it off]. But sucker comes from down bottom [of the plant]; that, you have to cut 'em with the knife. Slip is easy. (Dole Company doesn't use suckers for planting anymore. But I hear that Del Monte still uses suckers. I don't know why, though.) [See diagram section in introduction.]

WN: When you were doing this type of work what did you think about?

MN: I used to think, "Well, I have to sweat up all like this; I'm not going to let my children do this kind of job."

WN: Did other things go through your mind while you were doing that kind of work?

MN: When you are working you don't think about anything. You say, "Well, I have to do this much, do little better than the other people."

WN: Could you talk at all?

MN: No, when you working we cannot bother the other people. As you finish one line, you come out, that's the time you drink water and talk to your next neighbor. That's all, yeah. Everybody, they don't pay attention with other people. Especially when contract.

WN: So you didn't get any wages at all, by the hour?

MN: Those days we didn't, but later [during off season], when you go to hoe-hana, like that, you get. The lunas, [when] they know this field has plenty, can make contract money, then they tell, "This going to be contract." In the morning, they tell you, "This going

to be contract," how much a thousand, like that. But when there's not many [slips to pick], they said, "Today is daywork, but try your best."

But that's the time [I tell them,] "We keep working but if not many, we couldn't slip many [pick too many slips]."

They say, "How come? Why don't you do little bit more?"

I say, "No, that's all. Go inside and look."

WN: How about after the union came in, in 1946?

MN: After the union came was not many contract. Most was by hour pay.

WN: Well, we can get into the union later on. Were there any type of benefits that the company provided for you folks?

MN: Like us, the first part, before the union came out we had free house, water and everything was free, doctor was free, yeah. And bus for the children were all provided by the company, and what else? Oh, they used to give kerosene for the stove.

WN: The bus took the children to school?

MN: Yeah, to the school.

WN: Were there any day care centers?

MN: No, they didn't have day care center. But nineteen....when my younger son was about kindergarten Dole start day care center.

WN: What type of changes did you notice, from the time you started in 1937 up to the time you left the company [1963]? What were the changes that you noticed in wages and benefits?

MN: When the union came up was a great difference to the past. Like us, we didn't have much benefit from the union because they say we are temporary.

WN: How did you feel when you weren't included in the union benefits--the women?

MN: When unions got up, "How about you folks? You want to join the union?"

I said, "Well, yeah." About four or five of us, the wahines, we say, "Well, since the union came up, when they tell us join, let's join. Everything is going to be under the union. Once you get in there, I think it's going to be better for us." And so we joined.

WN: Getting back to the working conditions, did you get any rest breaks?

MN: Rest break? No rest break. Just one thing with the pineapple. I don't know about the sugar but we don't have no break.

WN: What about when you have to go to the toilet?

MN: That's up to you. You just sneak off. (Laughs)

WN: Were there any portable toilets?

MN: No, no, no. You just go to the bushes.

WN: What if when you were working with men around?

MN: Well, men, they don't care. They just keep working.

WN: What did you do for lunch?

MN: We had half an hour lunch time, so we just grab a meal. And rest of the time, everybody lay down and rest.

WN: So when you bring your lunch from home, where did you leave it while you were working?

MN: We leave it under the shade of the pineapple, because the pineapple is tall.

WN: Was there a lot of shade there?

MN: When you go side of the field there's lot of trees. But when it's a big area like you see Brodie's [camp] side like that, where they have that Dole stand [now]. Dole pineapple stand. All around there is no [trees]. So we just leave 'em by the pineapple and the plants, where that shade is.

WN: What were the dangerous parts about working out in the fields?

MN: Working in the field...

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MN: [When you get hurt], you tell your luna, foreman, so he has a first-aid kit. He will do for you but he says, "Wait till the head foreman comes around and take you to dispensary."

WN: Where was the dispensary?

MN: Wahiawa, down where they have the hospital now. They had that Dole dispensary there.

WN: What about when you had your period?

MN: No, they all manage somehow. They go down the gulch and....that's the time, they take their time. That, they won't say anything, even how long you take your time.

WN: So all you do is go up to the luna?

MN: Yeah.

WN: Can you tell us what things you wore out in the field, while working?

MN: While working, well, those days, you wear long underpants just like a pants. And you wear your slacks long, and your jacket. Not the thin kind; heavy kind. And you wear your arm protector (which was made of denim. All the women sewed their own arm protector because the company ones were too short). You have your own glove. With only the slacks, it's going to poke. You have another canvas apron on. Nowadays, I see the young women, they wear those rubber boots. But like our days, we wear the regular working shoes.

WN: How about on your head?

MN: Head, we have kerchief on and with the working hat. And we have a goggle on.

WN: Did you have to buy all that?

MN: No, the goggles and all, gloves, those, company supply you.

WN: And at the end of the day you just take the goggles home?

MN: Yeah. That one, they provide the first one, that's for you. But if you lose so many times, they going to charge [you]. If it's broken or the screen mesh up like that, they change for you.

WN: Wasn't it hot with all that on?

MN: Oh, I tell you, sweat comes up....yeah.

WN: Were there instances of women fainting because of the heat?

MN: Oh yeah. I heard about that. Young women, they go out in the field, about first two, three days out in the heat, they do. But after they get used to, it's okay.

WN: Even when you did weeding, you still had to wear the same things?

MN: Yeah. When just about the plants about like that...

WN: About a foot high?

MN: Yeah, foot high. You don't need. Just a glove, it's okay with the goggle. Goggle, you have to use it. But other than that, you don't need those canvas apron. Just a regular apron. We used to---after we got 45, 50 years old, they make a group, hoe-hana gang. It's kind of old ladies, just before retiring age, they make about two [groups]. Little young group and the old group. And they send you to the small little plants, just planted. That's the kind we used to like.

WN: Because that's the easiest?

MN: Yeah.

WN: So did they put all the older women together?

MN: They put older women about the same age in one group. About 15 or 16. And the other one, little younger one than the other group. (They separated us because the older women couldn't keep up with the younger ones. During the busy season, they would ask the younger group to go and harvest. The older ones couldn't.)

WN: What were some of the difficult parts of the field? I mean, there are the easy ones, when the plant is only a foot high; but what about some difficult areas?

MN: You know, when the pineapple is the first crop, it's getting ready to ripe and the [harvesting] machine cannot go in yet, they let all go in and pick. And the plant leaf is all go like that.

WN: Interwoven?

MN: It's hard to pass inside. But still, you open the leaves like that, and go in.

WN: Not much room to pass?

MN: Yeah.

WN: Is this the first plant crop or the ratoon crop?

MN: The first. The new plants. That was the most [difficult] thing, we didn't like that. Like machine, like harvester, it's all right. You go in one side and come back the other side, so it's easy to go in. But when you go pick by a bag, they don't care where to go. That's the one was hard. (When we worked with the harvester, you hold on to the boom with one hand. That way, the machine pulls you along through the rows. That made it easier to pass.)

WN: How did they assign you where you were going to pick?

MN: In the morning, you go out where the dispatch is. In the morning, you [look for] your [luna's] number [on] a board there, and it says, "Today, so and so field, and what kind of job." So then, we



start squawking to our luna.

I say, "Why you have to take this kind of place?" (Laughs)

WN: So you go where your luna goes?

MN: Yeah. We're assigned.

WN: And how many in one gang?

MN: Like us, was about 15, 16.

WN: And how many of that were women?

MN: It's all women. Women group. We had two women group; one was little---almost ready to retire, and the other one is little younger one. But I hear, like now, they have all women women group. [The war] days, Kaukonahua, we were all mixed up with the men (because there were not enough women working during the war, during the labor shortage. I don't know why, but the Filipino women in our camp didn't work.)

WN: You said when you squawked to the luna, could he do anything about it?

MN: No, he couldn't do anything. He says, "Well, no talk. Follow me. Bumbai, I get good place for you folks."

WN: Did you ever feel that you were getting the hard places all the time?

MN: No, we didn't think about that. "Today we have a hard time, difficult place." Next day, you have some good place. Anyway, they arrange like that.

WN: What about hills?

MN: Pineapple fields don't have too much hills. Only trouble is we used to go far away. Like Waimea. You know where the Waimea waterfall is? Right above there we used to go work, weeding. In the morning, it's good; we go out, takes about one hour to go up the working place. Coming home, 3 o'clock we finish [working]. we come back, by the time we come home is after 4. Everybody got so disgusted, nobody at the dispatch.

WN: You said you became a gang luna eventually; when was that?

MN: When the children start coming out to work.

WN: Was this during the war?

MN: During the war, yeah. I think that was about 1945....yeah, I think about 1945, 1946. (I usually was luna only during summers. And



when the regular luna was sick or something, I would take his place.)

WN: Talking about the war, could you describe what work was like during the war?

MN: December [1941] came and until February [1942], all the plantation was closed. February, they start, they said, "Well, we're going to start work from tomorrow." We went out, we worked together with the Filipinos. We don't know what they going to do to us. But after that, well, it was okay. No trouble, nothing trouble.

WN: Did they give you any instructions; air raid instructions?

MN: They gave us mask, but they didn't tell us to bring the mask to work.

WN: Why was that?

MN: I think they were afraid--had all kind of sponges and all things for the gas mask--[of] smashing that little instrument down here, [which had] the gas inside, I think. Little can. They didn't tell us to bring that. They didn't give any instruction.

WN: Were you afraid at all, working out in the open field?

MN: Well, not so.

WN: You said you were afraid of what the Filipinos thought of you.

MN: Yeah. You don't know what they're going to do, eh? Mostly, those Filipinos, they came from--that was 1946--those immigrants came from Ilocanos. They were rough people, not like the old-timers. They all carry the knife, go out to work. But now, they all all right.

WN: During the war there was the labor shortage, and lot of the men went to war.

MN: Yeah, that's right. And all went to defense job because the pay was good.

WN: Why didn't you go to a defense job?

MN: Well, they don't care for women. (Laughs) Defense, they want only men.

WN: Did the pine company encourage you to stay?

MN: Yeah, they said. But like us, we said, "No sense go out in the defense job." Some, they went.

WN: Would the pay have been better?

MN: Yeah, better. Because only we had 20 cents an hour [in the fields]. They had 40 cents an hour. When the labor shortage, that's the time school children from town came out to work in the field.

WN: So you became a gang luna.

MN: Yeah. We had a head foreman on top of us. He divide all the trucks. One truck....they divide it into four groups. Usually, they used to give me girls. And the men folks, they give them boys. But those days, the students was real good, not like now. They behave, and you tell them what to do, they do.

WN: Did you just have students under you? Did you have any [regular] men under you?

MN: Well, when no students, and the regular foreman sick or something, I used to take his place.

WN: So how did the men feel about working under a woman?

MN: They didn't say anything. I think they feel more relaxed, I think. If men foreman, they won't say joke, but to me, they used to tell me jokes and all kind. I think they feel relaxed.

WN: Were there other women foremen?

MN: Yeah. Did you see Mrs. Irene Suetani?

WN: Mrs. [Irene] Hidalgo [another interviewee], now?

MN: Yeah. She was one. And then, Mrs. Taniguchi [another interviewee] was one. They were later. I was the first and they were later than me.

WN: But why did they choose you to be a luna?

MN: That, I don't know.

WN: Did your pay increase when you became a luna?

MN: Yeah. (Before the union [1946], luna, only got about five cents an hour more. But after, the union was good because we had the job classification [lunas were classified a higher pay grade].)

WN: This was about the time when Filipinos started to come in to work in the plantations, in a large number.

MN: That's after the war. That's 1945 the war ends, and they start coming in 1946. And most of them came [in] 1947.

WN: So you remained a luna after the war?

MN: Yeah, I did.

WN: When the Filipino men started to come in, were any women laid off?

MN: No, no.

WN: You mentioned that in 1937, when you started working in the fields, you also worked doing laundry for the Filipino men?

MN: Yes, I still did.

WN: Can you tell us something about that? Can you explain that job?

MN: My children used to go [pick up the laundry]. They know the Filipinos' name. (I washed for) about only 10 bachelors. They go gather the bachelors [laundry] on Friday afternoon and bring 'em up. Saturday, after work, I used to---not like now, we didn't have no machine, those days. We boil 'em, put 'em in the big tub with lots of detergent inside. Boil 'em, and then we take 'em out just like [how the ladies in Korea used to do]. We used to pound it, pound it [with a stick], and rinse 'em in the water. Used to be real nice and clean.

WN: Did you do this in the off season?

MN: Even off season. And the real good guys, I used to keep 'em even the peak season, too. Was only \$2 a month, with all the dirty clothes.

WN: Who paid it? The Filipino men paid it or the company?

MN: The individual, they pay.

WN: How did you find time, between working in the fields, doing the laundry, and taking care of your children?

MN: Oh yeah. But the children was good, they didn't give me no trouble. The oldest one take care the younger one.

WN: Which did you prefer doing; did you prefer laundry or did you prefer working out in the fields?

MN: Working out in the field is best. Later on, I started working regular day. I said, "Well, I going to quit the laundry." Most of our friend, when I quit the laundry they said, "Oh, I'm going to quit, too." They all quit.

WN: So you all quit same time?

MN: Yeah, same time.

WN: But then, how did they do their laundry after that?

MN: (Laughs) Was something to talk about.

My friend, she lives in Whitmore, she always comes to the luncheon. I said, "You know, had Warren Nishimoto who's working like this and he came and talk about that."

"Oh, I want to go and talk to him, too."

I said, "You bumbai, you too young yet."

(Laughter)

WN: You were talking about carrying the pines in the canvas sack; when the conveyor belt harvester came in--which was about 1947--how did it change your work out in the fields?

MN: The first part we said, "Now we don't need to carry the pineapple and we're going to get little good [easier] time now." But was still the same.

WN: Could you describe what your work was like with the conveyor belt [harvester]?

MN: Well, it's that you don't carry the heavy thing so that much it's save you energy. Most of the time, it's contract, see. One load is so many tons--they go by tons--and contract. The luna, they want to make more, so he says to hurry up [to the] driver. So he gives 'em one step gas, the truck goes fast. So that's the time it's real hard. The pineapples are all ripe on the rows, you have to pick. Slam 'em up. No time to see the conveyor. And when the truck gets out from the conveyor and another truck goes under that, that's the time you have two, three minutes. That's the time you real relaxed. Oh, this is the time you feel relaxed.

WN: When one truck fills up, they replace it with an empty one.

MN: Yeah. And besides that, sometimes you think that [you picked] plenty fruits but once you go inside, only the entrance [of the truck] has the fruit and inside not many. That's the time they says, "We cannot make money, we have to hurry up with the truck."

And the truck driver knows that, he speed up. And we have to chase the truck. Oh, that's real fast....

WN: So when you folks started working with the conveyor you got paid by group incentive?

MN: Yeah. It's like by group because the whole group, how many you make.

WN: So wasn't the individual anymore?

MN: No. So we help each other. You go inside so we pick---we not all friends, about 14, 15. Some were real friends. So when we go inside, we all go inside with our friends. Say, "You come next

to me, you come next to me," and so we help each other.

WN: This was all women?

MN: Yeah, all women working. Sometimes, when the men don't have enough, they send you there. They say, "You go to that men group today."

They say, "Oh, we going be more tired working with the men. [If] we the only one, we don't want to go. [But if] two or three, we like to go."

And then, the men folks are real good. He says, "You wahines go between us." And they help you.

Sometimes you real disgusted. We says, "Oh, tomorrow, I'm not going to work; stay home." But the morning comes, you say, "No, I cannot stay home. I have to go out in the field."

WN: Did you pick with both hands?

MN: The harvester? Oh yeah, you have to. First, we cannot. Later on, when you get a little technique, just twist 'em like that.

WN: You just twist it by the crown and it snaps right off?

MN: Yeah. Uh huh.

WN: Those speed-ups, was it very often that they did this?

MN: No, not often. Only once in a while.

WN: And would you complain often when it started to speed up?

MN: Oh yeah. We used to say, "How come you speed up? Go slow."

"No. You guys want to make money, eh?"

WN: The luna said that?

MN: Yeah. And the truck driver, too. He knows.

WN: When the conveyor belt harvester came out, did you notice more workers or less workers in the field, or anything like that?

MN: I think it's less. Less workers.

WN: Do you think that they laid people off?

MN: I think by that time, the young people didn't like to work in the field. When the peak season [came], the young students comes out to work. So that's what they get. They didn't lay off or anything. Regular workers is steady; they don't have too much regular workers. Even they hire the students to fill 'em up, to make 'em even.

WN: Did they hire cannery workers from Dole cannery?

MN: During the war time, we had. Because the pineapple came from Lanai. The fruits came from Lanai, [and] there were a labor shortage [in] the cannery. And Wahiawa was kind of late [with the summer crop] so they told us to go down cannery to help them. So we went about two summer, I think. I don't know about the other ladies. I didn't like it. I hate to work with the [Ginaca] machine.

WN: What did you do in the cannery?

MN: I was trimming. And one of my niece works in there as forelady, see. She tells me, "Auntie, tomorrow is holiday, you know. We have time and a half; you better come out."

I say, "Oh, okay." Then, I went. The time and a half, the machine sure goes time and a half, too.

(Laughter)

WN: How were the foreladies there, in the cannery?

MN: Oh, they were mean. And after the season, they come out work in the fields. That's the time you say, "Well, you folks treat us mean so now we're going to treat you folks."

WN: How did you treat them mean? What did you make them do?

MN: (Laughs) No, that's only what we tell them, but we don't do anything.

WN: So how long did you work in the cannery?

MN: Cannery, I think only about two, three weeks, I think. So I told my boss, I tell my field boss, "Well, I cannot come back?"

He says, "Why, you no like there?"

I said, "I don't like. Well, I still have to go there until they say they don't want me?"

He said, "No. You can come back if you want to."

"Oh, okay then. From Monday, I'm not going then."

And my other lady friend says, "If you not going, I'm not going, too." So we all quit.

WN: So you could come back and work in the field?

MN: Work in the field.

WN: How did you get out there, to the cannery?

- MN: Oh, the company provide the bus. Those days, company had about six bus.
- WN: So while you were working in the cannery, who stayed back to work in the fields?
- MN: Men folks. Not many men folks.
- WN: Did they give you any reason why it was just the women that they sent down to the cannery?
- MN: No, no, they didn't say anything. They know they cannot do anything in the cannery.
- WN: You mean the men can't do anything in the cannery.
- MN: Yeah. They don't want [workers] in the warehouse, can shop, like that, they don't want. They only want wahines for the trimming and packing.
- WN: Pineapple is a seasonal thing. When you first started in 1937, you worked only in the peak season. What did you do during the off season?
- MN: Off season, I used to watch my children and do laundry--that's the Filipino men folks'--and do some gardening. Yeah, quite a bit of work.
- WN: Would you have preferred to work full time in the fields?
- MN: In the first part, even I didn't think about that because they didn't do that so....
- WN: Before the union came in did you get any type of unemployment benefit or any type of aid at all?
- MN: No, we didn't have any of that.
- WN: Did you find that very difficult to live with?
- MN: Yeah. After the union came out, and was around November [1946], they lay us off. He says, "So we going to hire you before the peak season, around April [1947]. Right now, you folks go to employment and get your compensation." That was the first one.
- WN: That was right after [the union], about 1946?
- MN: Yeah. And the labor law came out, I think so. I'm not sure, but anyway, had the labor law. [Although cannery workers began receiving unemployment compensation in 1939, coverage for field workers was sporadic and an exact date cannot be determined.]
- WN: Did you look for any other types of work, during off season?
- MN: No. All the time I've been working, at least three, four months I

stay home, do all my sewing, house cleaning, get ready for the next season.

WN: How was your life different in the off season?

MN: Well, relax. Nobody chase you. But was quite busy.

WN: Did you look forward to the peak seasons?

MN: No, I didn't. I didn't even think about that. Just every day was every day.

WN: Wasn't it different because there were more people out there? Students and so forth?

MN: No....

WN: Did the nature of the work change at all, during the peak season?

MN: No, it's same. Pineapple is the same. No difference.

WN: How did you get along with the seasonal workers?

MN: They were good to me. And still I used to do my best.

WN: Talking about the union, were you included in the union benefits right away, after the union formed?

MN: After the union formed, was not right away, though. Cannery, like that, it's okay but out in the field was not. Even when I quit from the pineapple, they told me I have blood pressure, kidney trouble, and so they tell me to retire. But I said, "I went my doctor. My doctor don't say anything about that." But company doctor says that, I cannot believe it. And I told them, "If you want to tell me I want to retire or something, don't say anything about the health. Tell me, 'You're getting old, take your time off and retire.' That way, I don't feel bad."

And I told to the union boss. I says, "You folks cannot fix up that, since I'm paying the union fee?"

He says, "Oh, we'll fix that up. Don't quit. You stay like that."

I wait, wait, wait. Union can't do anything. I says, "Oh, you folks, even how long I wait, you folks can't do anything. I going to quit. Don't think about me. I guess I'll quit."

Union can't do anything.

WN: This is in 1963?

MN: Yeah, 1963. Like [in] the cannery, union is real strong. Out in the field, not so.



WN: Why do you think that was?

MN: I don't know. Because my sister-in-law's brother, he's a real union man--steward. Well, he tells me, "Why don't you talk with that union boss?"

I said, "I talk to him so many time, but I give up. I rather stay home."

WN: As far as grievances were concerned, was it easier to file a grievance after the union came in, than before?

MN: To us, before the union came up was much easier. (Before the union, when the luna says "Do something," you just do it. If you had a complaint, you just go up to the luna. Then sometimes, the luna would day, "When the field boss comes, go talk to him."

(But after the union came in, the steward would come around and tell us, "Don't do that. That's not your job, that's the regular workers' job." And when you had a complaint, you had to go step-by-step above the boss. Was a real hassle. That's why I say, before the union was easier.)

But still, I'm lucky. After, I thanks to that company doctor. He told me I have so much trouble with my body. If he didn't tell me, I think I still work until 65, out in the hot sun. Maybe I think I collapse or something. After he tell me, I quit, and then I went to work in the Wheeler Field. Was much easier, and I had good time. Till 65.

WN: What do you remember about the strike in 1947?

MN: The pineapple strike? Oh, that, my husband was not in that plantation. They had another plantation. His company, it is under Dole but he had it separate. [MN's husband was a carpenter for Dole housing.] They were under the plantation housing group, so every day he goes out to work [during the strike]. And the Filipinos, they all on strike. They pass around the camp, they walk around where my husband work and says, "O-san, you lucky." He said he was afraid. Maybe they going to do something to him.

WN: Your husband wasn't classified under union benefits?

MN: No, no, no. That, the planatation housing, they didn't [want] union.

WN: So he was another different....

MN: Yeah. They were under the housing project.

WN: What about you and the women?

MN: Women were all under the union.

WN: So did you participate in the strike?

MN: No. Some ladies, they used to go participate in that. But like us, we said, "No, we stay home. Don't bother them"

WN: So you didn't work, then?

MN: No, we didn't work.

WN: I mean as scabs?

MN: No.

WN: Did they tell you not to work?

MN: No, they didn't say anything. But we says, "I think we better stay home. You don't know what you going to get when you go out and work."

Company say, "If you want to work you can."

But we says, "Might as well stay home. Before you get some trouble."

WN: You said your husband was afraid.

MN: Yeah, he was. Yeah.

WN: In what way? What was he afraid of?

MN: He was afraid because you don't know, all these people from the Philippines, they don't know what is what. So he says, "They might hit you with a stick or hit you with a fist, or what."

WN: What about the union officials; did they tell you people anything?

MN: No, they didn't say anything. To us women, they didn't care much. In our camp was real quiet. Kaukonahua. I heard some camp....I think where Mrs. Taniguchi [another interviewee] was, I think they had some trouble.

WN: Do you remember what camp that was?

MN: That was Kipapa-5.

WN: What type of trouble?

MN: I'm not sure, but....some people were going to work or something. And that the strikers went against them? They had some kind of trouble over there.

WN: Were there picket lines?

MN: Something like picket lines. Like us, my husband is not included

in the union, [so when] he want to go to Wahiawa like that, he [showed] the union officials a little card that he's not a union member. He gets that, and he used to get out from that pickets. How many was that? Seven days strike? They didn't gain any one cent. Even they want to get little higher wage, like that; no, company didn't give.

WN: This was 1947 strike?

MN: Yeah, they did seven days they went no income; that's all.

WN: They got some benefits?

MN: Only for some kind of benefits they had. But for the raise, they didn't have.

WN: You were saying they didn't receive any raise at all in 1947?

MN: That's what I understand. But I think they had some benefit, though. I forgot what it was but I think they had.

[The 5-1/2 day strike of 1947 resulted in an increase of 10 cents per hour in the minimum wage for each labor grade.]

END OF INTERVIEW.

Tape No. 6-18-2-79

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Motoe Nihei (MN)

March 14, 1979

Wahiawa, Oahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mrs. Motoe Nihei. Today is March 14, 1979. And we are at her home in Wahiawa.

Last time, when we were talking, you mentioned a lot about how things were before the war and how things were after the war. Can you describe in detail how your work was different before the war as compared to after the war?

MN: Well, before the war, we didn't have no grades [job classification system]. [Everything was] all one whole big thing. So, the wage problem, it was the same thing. We didn't have grade A, grade B, one or two, like this. [Every job had the same pay rate.] Only thing is, you want to make money, you go ahead with your contract. But after the war, the union came in. They put the department, the grades, and all kind. And the wages, the same thing with the department. [You were paid according to your job in the field.] The wages went up, too. Like harvesting department, the wages was, for one hour, I think was 5 cents or 10 cents over than the planting [stripping] department. And weeding department. The weeding department was the lowest one. [According to the new job classification system in 1946, a woman fruit picker received 75 cents an hour (labor grade two), while a woman weeder received 70 cents an hour (labor grade one).]

WN: Before the war, what? All was the same?

MN: All was the same. Yeah.

WN: How did you feel about the job classification?

MN: Job classification, at first we all puzzle up, yeah? We says, "Oh, we don't like that things." But after a while, after you get used to, well, it was okay. Yeah, it was okay. Because even you go to weeding, the wages was way low, well, low. But you go to harvesting, all of sudden---10 cents or 25 cents, you get up. Oh, you feel so happy, eh? Oh, you say, "Oh, you're going to get 25 cents

or 20 cents over than yesterday's." But, we were on the planting [stripping] department, see? The planting department was in between [weeding and harvesting]. In between. And we were hired as the harvesting, you know. And the rate [for stripping] was low. So, that we didn't like it. Yeah.

WN: Did you go from one job to another, day by day?

MN: Oh, most of the time was not, but. When they tell you to go, well, we have to. Yeah. But most of the time, we were on the planting department, so we kept on in that department. But, when the harvesting is busy, they send us to the harvesting side.

WN: Were you aware of the different job classifications and the different pay rates?

MN: Pay rate? Well, the job, we didn't care too much [because] we could do everything. But the rate, sometimes we [weren't] satisfy.

WN: But you knew before you started working on that day that you were going to get less [or more]?

MN: Yeah. They tell us, "Tomorrow, you going to work on the harvesting department."

So, then we know, "Oh, tomorrow we going to get more than today, yeah." Sometimes, it was good. Sometimes, well, not so.

WN: You said you didn't like it [the job classification system] at first. Because you got different pay.

MN: Yeah.

WN: Can you go into more detail on why you didn't like it at first?

MN: Well, you get all mix up, puzzle up, you know. Today, you work on this job, you get so much. Tomorrow, all of sudden, you get more. And then, you come back again, you going to the down rate.

WN: So, you liked it before when it was all the pay was the same.

MN: Yeah. And even they had those departments, like our department was planting department, we used to tell the boss, "We don't want to go to the other department. We just want to stay on our department."

He says, "No." But busy time, [you have to change when they tell you to]. But most of the time, we used to work on our department.

WN: How about piecework or contract work. Did it change after the union came in?

MN: Well, after the union, they didn't have contract on those....selecting the plants [stripping], like that. It was all by grade---regular daywork in our pay. But, harvesting was contract. Even with the harvester was contract.

WN: Group contract?

MN: Yeah, group contract.

WN: So, like jobs such as stripping slips, was that contract?

MN: No, no. That wasn't contract. They tell you to do how many....at least you have to make so many rows today.

WN: Which did you prefer when you pulled the slips? Did you prefer contract work, or did you prefer daywork?

MN: Why, daywork is better. But even daywork, we used to do over than our amounts. In the first of the morning, they tell us, "Today, at least you have to make so many lines today." To complete the eight hours. But at least we used to do more than that.

WN: So, when you were doing daywork, as compared to piecework, after the union, did your work slow down? Did you do less per day because it wasn't piecework?

MN: No, that we didn't do. Was the same. Yeah, was same.

WN: You were a full time regular in 1946 when the union came?

MN: Yeah. When the union came, was full time.

WN: Full time. So, you were included in the union benefits?

MN: Yeah. But, that's what they said but....by the last part, they said we were all thrown into that temporary workers--seasonal workers. So, we didn't have that benefit.

WN: When the union first came in 1946, I was reading what the benefits were. And it said that all non-regular and seasonals were excluded from union benefits. So, does that mean that they demoted you from full time [regular] to non-regular?

MN: I don't know why. They said they have enough that regular workers. So, all the wahines, they cut 'em down to seasonal workers.

WN: This is all the women?

MN: Yes. All the women.

WN: So how did you feel about that?

MN: Well, we grumble, but.... Still, [when] wahine grumbles [nobody does] anything. (Laughs)

WN: Who did you grumble to?

MN: To our luna. (Laughs) He say, "Well, cannot help. I didn't do that." He say, "Go to the big boss and tell 'em." But nobody wants to go to the big boss. (Laughs)

WN: What about the union? Did you go to them?

MN: Union? No. We didn't go to the union. And we says, "Well, at least they hire for the seasonal. It's okay." Well, those days was pretty good, you know. [The season lasted] until end of November. So, December, January, February--three months, we stayed home. Do all our thing, get ready for the next seasonal of work. It's about three months.

WN: So, are you saying that seasons became longer after the union?

MN: After the union, yeah. Yes, it was longer. Before the war, full seasonal was only about two months. And they lay you off.

WN: Why did the seasons get longer?

MN: I don't know. After that, I think after the war and the union came in, I think the company [Dole], they extend the field more than before the war. Because before the war, they didn't have those Waipahu area and all that other pineapple areas. They [had] only small area in Wahiawa, that's all.

WN: Did your working conditions improve at all after the union came in? Were there more rest breaks or things like that?

MN: No, it's about the same. We didn't have no break. So, it's about the same. You know, the company, they like the middle-aged woman. Because middle-aged women, they don't slow down. Just keep going, going, going. Like men folks, they says, "Oh, that's a tobacco time. Oh, so and so." They take their own break. But the women, they don't do that.

Even you go to the harvesting, you [follow] the harvesting machine, the middle-aged women like us, we work all together. If you go on the second, third ratoon place, there's lots of pineapple. If you pull out one [pineapple], there's another one [underneath]. About two, three layers, like that. The young boys, they go in there, only pick the top ones. But like us, we pull 'em up from on the top, take out all the ones you see ripe, you know. So, the company, they like that middle-aged women [to] work in the field.

WN: So, if they like the women to work, why do you think they made them just part-time [seasonal]?

MN: I don't know that. The way I think is, if seasonal, you [the company] don't need to give the [unemployment] compensation. Now, they have. Like our days, no compensation [to seasonal workers]. Those insurance benefits of doctors, all like that. They don't, they don't. If you are regular, they give you all that union's benefits. But like us seasonals, no, they don't. I think that's why they cut 'em down. That's what I think.

WN: Why didn't they just cut down the slow working men and keep the good women?

MN: Yeah, that's what some peoples, they complain about that. But, they said once they are in the union, they cannot lay them off, or something like that. Women is all seasonal. [The company] can do what they like.

WN: Were there any groups of women who got together to try to complain?

MN: Nobody. Only nobody.

WN: You said in the last interview that you thought in the canneries, the union was stronger than it was in the fields. Why do you think that was?

MN: Because what I think is, they have a good steward down there. Not like the field.

WN: What do you mean?

MN: They act stronger. Those union leaders and officers that works at the cannery.

WN: And the ones in the field weren't strong?

MN: No, the field is not.

WN: I mean, why?

MN: I don't know why. It's the same union. But the cannery is real stronger.

WN: Did you talk at all to the stewards?

MN: In the fields? Yes---we know them, so we talk about that. He says, "Well, no can help." That's what they say. And still, if they argue or go against the company, they're scared of getting laid off. That's one thing I think they're scared about. Like cannery, if once the company do lay off, or get suspended, or something like that, all the unions back them up. But the field, no. Nobody to back up.

WN: Do you remember any walkouts in the field?



MN: Walkout? I don't hear about that.

WN: I read that in 1961, I think about 400 walked out of Dole Plantation? Do you remember anything about that?

MN: There was something about seven-days strike or one-week strike? I think that was, I think. Nineteen sixty-one, I think was that.

WN: [No], I think it was just a walkout. They just didn't strike. They just walked out for one day.

MN: Yeah. I think was that. I'm not sure but was about then.

WN: When the union came in, how soon were you informed that you had to be [dropped] to [seasonal]?

MN: About five or six months later. If I work with the men group, I used to be the same pay with the men's. Was 60 cents an hour, I think. And then, the boss told me one day. He says, "Obasan, you going [to] lose out, you know."

I say, "Why? I want to work the same as---why, why I going lose out?"

He said, "Because now the union has all the grades. And you are women, so you get 10 cents less than the men. We like give you the same, but---" They said they cannot.

[I say], "Oh, well, they [the women] going to have only 50 cents, and they [the men] get 60 cents?"

He say, "Yeah, that's what we going to get. Well, no can help."

[Then I say], "Well, it's all right." And that was the first time I was different from the men. Before that, I had everything same with the men.

WN: Were most of the women out in the field aware that they were getting 10 cents less than the men?

MN: Yeah. Oh, everybody start grumbling. (Laughs) Can't do anything. (Laughs)

WN: It wasn't until 1972 when they got equal.

MN: Yeah.

WN: Did the union ever come over to explain it to you folks?

MN: Well, once in a while, they had a union meeting. They explain to us this and that, see? And after we became a seasonal worker, we got out from the union. We used to pay the union fee, too. But we

says, "Oh, since we not going to get the benefit, we not going to pay the fee, too."

But they used to tell us, "You going to get the benefits, so pay the fee, and [the union] will back you up. But nobody did that-- pay the \$5. (Laughs) Five dollars [per year] was the fee, I think."

WN: So, what is your overall opinion of the union?

MN: Well, it's one thing good. But, to me, it didn't make too much [difference] to me. I think for men folks, it's real good. If we were regular workers, I think it was okay. But we were seasonals.

WN: Another difference you talked about, comparing before the war and then after the war, was that the women started to do little more work [after the war started]. They started to pick pines. Before [the war] they used to just cut the crowns, yeah? Was that a big difference in your working conditions?

MN: Yeah, that was a big difference. Because [if] you only cut the crowns, and pack in the box, you get less pay. But you go out and pick the pine and cut [the crowns] and crate in the box, it's about more than half difference. (When you only cut off the crowns and pack in the box, you get less than half of what you would be getting if you picked the pine, too. For example, if the company was paying 10 cents per box piecework, the men pickers would get six cents and the women cutting off the crowns for the men would get only four cents. So we figured that if the women were allowed to pick their own pineapple, we would get the full amount.) You get more. So, everybody start saying, "Well, we want to go pick and crate." That's more easy. When you pick, you are tired. But when you come out [of the rows] and cut and crate, [that's when] you have a little break. And when the man folks [come] in and come out, you don't need to wait [for them], you can do your own. All the women would like that.

WN: Did you notice a big change in your work before and after [the harvesting machine came in 1947]?

MN: Well, yes. Because like summer, in the hot days, you carry [the pineapple] in the canvas bag and take it out [to the road], that was a real hard job. But, at least [with] the harvester, you have a little break. Wasn't like now. They didn't go fast. They just keep up with the men, or women, or children. But now, it's not.

WN: You mean, now...

MN: They just go fast. According to the field. The driver knows this field has how many ton of pineapple or what. Or the luna knows that.

- WN: Another change that occurred after the war, was there a lot of Filipinos who came in?
- MN: Yes, they came in.
- WN: Did that change the nature of your work?
- MN: Well, I think that didn't change too much, you know. Before that, before the Filipinos came in, was most of us Japanese. Japanese. And when the Filipinos came in, all these people [the Japanese], went up to lunas, or supervisors, or something all up. So, that did change.
- WN: When the union came in [after the war], they eliminated perquisites. Things that the company used to provide. Do you remember what they eliminated?
- MN: Rent, doctors, bus service. They used to give kerosene for all the working people.
- WN: So, this is what the company provided before the union came?
- MN: Yeah. So the family people [felt] a great difference [after the union], you know. Doctor bill and the bus fare. We didn't pay that. And the rent.
- WN: So, after the union came in, you had to pay for all this?
- MN: Everything, yeah. Everything. So, you have a little higher pay, but still, you lose out. (Laughs) Before that, all the family group, they had a meeting and they said, "[If] you don't want the raise, just stay like this." Company gives free house, kerosene, doctors and bus fare, like that. For the family people, they like that. But the bachelors, they said they don't care for that. I don't know how much the company say they going to give. But, the family group said no, they don't want [perquisites to be eliminated] but, you cannot beat those bachelors.
- WN: So the bachelors would rather have the higher wages?
- MN: Yeah.
- WN: Do you remember how much you were paying for rent?
- MN: Well, we had a two-bedroom house, [with a living quarter]. And the kitchen. With that, we paid \$22 something [per month], I think.
- WN: And this is for a house at Kaukonahua?
- MN: Yeah. Most of the Dole Company's family house was about there [that price].

WN: And you were raising how many children?

MN: Six.

WN: Six. So, was it large enough?

MN: The house? [When] the kids was all small, it's okay. They can sleep in the living quarter, bedroom, like that. When the boys start growing up, we rent one bachelor's quarters. Let the boys stay in there, right in front our house.

WN: So was that extra rent?

MN: Yeah, we had to pay extra. I think that was about \$2 for a room.

WN: Could you go into little more detail on what your house was like?

MN: It's kind of big two-bedroom house. With a kitchen. We didn't have no dining room. And the bathroom was outside. Our place was at the end of the camp, see? So we had [our] own bathhouse--furo. And the people living in the center part, they [used] the big furo that they all go in together. (There were three community bath-houses in Kaukonahua camp. One for each cluster of houses. The bathhouse was in the middle of each cluster.)

WN: How did you get to have your own [furo]?

MN: Was pretty good. Yeah, pretty good. They [the company] provide that firewood.

WN: Did you make your furo?

MN: Yes. With the redwood. The boys used to---they take by chance [take turns]. One of them just wait.

WN: How is it that your family got to have their own furo?

MN: Because it was so far to the community furo. So, one of the people that lived in our house before, they had that [furo]. And my husband fix it up and said, "I think we better make our own furo." So, we start then. After that, since the union came out, they [the company] didn't give out the firewood. We had to get 'em. He says, "Oh, that's too much." And the boys, they start grumbling.

They say, "We don't want to chop wood." (Laughs)

So, my husband says, "Oh, let's buy that water heater." So we bought the kerosene water heater. And that was pretty good.

WN: Was the field that you worked at, was it close to your house?

MN: Oh, yeah. Like now, it's Whitmore Field. It's across the little gulch. At Kaukonahua. And we used to go all over the Dole fields. Even to Waimea side. Waipahu. All over. What they need for the planting department, we used to go all over. So, one day, you stay near your camp. But you don't know--the next day, you [go] away from your camp.

WN: So, you report to the Dole offices?

MN: Yeah. They tell you tomorrow where to go.

WN: So, if you had to go to someplace far, did you have to report earlier?

MN: No. That was a good problem, you know. In the morning, you report [the] same [time as you would if the field were close to your camp]. The problem is coming home. When you go way out to Waimea side, in the morning, you start [work] about 9 o'clock. It takes so long. That's the time was real good. [But] then coming home, we work until 3 o'clock, [then] come back. Nobody is at the dispatch already. All went home. We don't get anything [pay]. That was the problem when we go far away.

WN: Could you describe what a typical work day was like from the time you woke up to the time you folks pau hana?

MN: Well, I used to get up 4 o'clock in the morning. And like regular days [off-season], was okay. Only myself and my husband. But my husband used to work in the camp, see? He was a carpenter helper. So, he's around the camp. So he don't need the lunch. He comes home and have his lunch. When summertime, I had to pack three boys' and myself and the girl [daughter]. I have to pack lunch for them. If we all go on a day shift, it's all right. [But] the boys, they don't like the day shift. They rather have night shift harvesting. By the time they come home, it's 1 o'clock in the morning. I have to get ready for some snack. When dry weather, it's all right, but wet---rain, they all get wet. So, I make coffee and sandwich. And then, they tell me, "Don't get up. Go to bed." They say they can manage. [But] once you get up, you couldn't sleep.

WN: And what else did you do in the morning?

MN: Well, I make breakfast and all pack the lunch. And get ready for myself, too.

WN: How long did it take to put all your clothing on?

MN: Clothing? Well, not much. Working clothing, you don't take time.

WN: And so, what time did you have to go to the...

MN: Dispatch, over there? Oh, around 6 o'clock [a.m.].

WN: And then, you find out where you're going to go?

MN: Yeah. They have on the little board. They says what group goes to where. What field and where.

WN: Then when you pau hana, about 3 o'clock [p.m.]?

MN: Three o'clock, the pau hana. And by the time we come home, we come home to the dispatch, it's around 3:30.

WN: And then, what? You folks just go home?

MN: Yeah. Like here, when we move here [Wahiawa], my husband used to come and stay by the dispatch to pick me up. [Before Whitmore was built in 1948, each camp had its own dispatch station. When the camps were combined into one at Whitmore, it became the site of the only dispatch station.]

WN: When you got home, did you talk about your work to your husband?

MN: No, I don't talk with him. What I had in the field, I forget all about it. (Laughs) He has his own problem.

WN: So you didn't talk at all about, you know, maybe something funny happened or something.

MN: Sometimes you get real mad with the luna like that. What you don't like, they let you do, like that. That's what I used to tell. But my husband, he said, "Don't talk about those things." (Laughs)

WN: So when you got home, what did you usually do?

MN: First thing is, I drink cup of coffee, or something. And I start prepare for the dinner.

WN: And then, after dinner, what did you usually do?

MN: Look at the papers or magazines and by the time, you're ready to fall down. (Laughs)

WN: What time did you usually go to sleep?

MN: Well, those days, was around 9 o'clock [p.m.]. Yeah, those days, we didn't have TV, you know. [All] we had was radio. That's all. Funny, eh?

WN: So, do you feel that the job that you were doing in pine, that you had time to cook and to clean and to do laundry?

MN: At home, yeah. We sure used to work hard. Like Saturdays, Sundays, you didn't have no time to go around. The boys used to help me. Went to deliver the all washed laundry, like that. They know

where those bachelors live. They used to bring it for me. Bring back the old dirty clothes.

WN: Did you do your family's laundry at the same time?

MN: No, I do my family laundry before the day. I don't want to mix up with them.

WN: So, before you go work, you do the family laundry?

MN: Uh huh. Well, those days, everybody did that.

WN: You said that your boys helped out. Did they have set chores that they had to do?

MN: Yeah, they had. We had quite a bit of chicken, because our house was right down by the gulch. We had a chicken coop, so the oldest [son] used to keep up with that. And the second one, he said he was going to be a farmer, so he used to dig the garden, raise all kind vegetables.

WN: At home, what did your husband do?

MN: My husband? He was boss of the family. (Laughs) But, he used to keep up with the gardening.

WN: When you say your husband was the boss of the family, did he make all the important financial decisions [for] the family?

MN: No, once he give me all the paychecks--those days, was not check, cash--he didn't bother anything. I'll do all what goes out, pay and everything.

WN: Oh, so you were doing that [handling the money]?

MN: Yeah. Still, now, he doesn't care.

WN: What about like if you have to make a big financial decision? Like to buy a car?

MN: That, he does. That, he decide what to do. He tells me, "Oh, do that, do this."

WN: How about disciplining the children? If the children were misbehaving? Which one of you usually did it?

MN: I have six, but....all of them is quite all right, you know. The first and the second son [were] real good. Even in high school, too. Had no trouble, no nothing. But the third one, he was a regular, normal guy. But, [since] the above two [were] so good, everybody keep an eye on him. They said, "How come your son, Henry, he's different from the two guys?" But, he's all right.



Since he joined the Marines, he's quite different man now. They are all right. I had no problem with the children.

WN: When they were younger and you were working in the fields, who usually watched them?

MN: By the time I went work, my oldest--the one I living with now--she was about 12 or 13. She didn't go out [to work] yet. She was weak. So, she used to watch the young ones, see? And one thing good is, my husband works around the camp, so he can keep an eye on the children. And during the war days, my oldest son, he start working from 12 years. In the field--pineapple field. And the second one, he was a much bigger guy, so 11-1/2, he start working. So, they were all right. They behave.

WN: Were there any day care centers around?

MN: Oh, no. Those days was no day care center. Only after war, was 1943 or 1944, somewhere around that. Dole start building the day care center. And my last son, I said, "I don't want to leave him only at the camp." Even the father keep eye on him, I said, "No good. Let's send him to the day care center." And so, I send him to the day care center.

WN: What did you think of the day care center?

MN: Was good. Pretty good.

WN: Was it free?

MN: We paid \$10 a month per child, which included lunch and bus. There was only one day care center for Dole company employees. It was located at Brodie-2 Camp near the present Dole pineapple stand. Dole provided school buses which came around to all the camps and picked up the children to go to school and to the day care center.

WN: After the union came in, did they still have the day care center?

MN: No, the day care center, that didn't last long. By the time [my son] go to kindergarten, the day care center closed down already.

WN: Why do you think that was?

MN: What I thought was, they should had that day care center. For the working mothers. Was good. Because they go to the day care center same [time] as the children goes to school. They ride on the same bus and they go to day care. And lunch, they had a school lunch. And those who watch the children, was the working mothers. Was real good day care center. I send him one year, and then, next [year], he went to kindergarten.

WN: Was it crowded? Was there a lot of kids going to the day care center?



MN: No, not much. I don't know why, but not much. From Kaukonahua, my son was the only one going there.

WN: On the weekends, when you didn't have to work, did you do anything with some of the women that you worked with?

MN: The weekends, no, we didn't gather together. We stayed home, do sewing, or.... No time to chat with the other ladies. Everybody is busy.

WN: Did you ever have to work on Saturdays and Sundays?

MN: Yeah, sometimes we did on Saturdays. Sunday, we didn't go, but Saturdays, we had. Was in the busy time. They used to tell us Saturday come out. Even the school children. After school's out, they used to go out work about two hours.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: [While] you were at Kaukonahua Camp, did you know any people living in other camps?

MN: Yes, I know. Because if we are in the same department, at least sometimes you work together.

WN: Did you ever talk to them about what their camp was like?

MN: Oh, we didn't talk about the camp. They talk about the family. And what is what, just like gossip kind.

WN: Did you hear beforehand that Kaukonahua was a good camp?

MN: Before that, no, I didn't hear about that. Kaukonahua, long time ago, they close down that camp, you know. And on 1936, they start open again. So, the time when we went [1937], they just start hiring the laborers.

WN: Were there activities inside the camp?

MN: Oh, yeah, they have. Not for the grown-up or older people, but for the young people.

WN: Do you remember what they had?

MN: Like my sons, they join that Little League, play football. All kinds they had. They had Boy Scout, too. Girls has Girl Scout, Four-H, all those.

WN: Were there things like camp picnics?

MN: I think once or twice, they had. But Christmas, they used to have a camp Christmas party. The camp boss provide everything. And all the people living in the camp, they go. Was a big Christmas party.

WN: Was this before the union came in?

MN: Yeah, before the union came.

WN: And what about after the union?

MN: No such things. (Laughs) No such things. Even the camp picnic, too, no. They drop out. And only what you have is with your friend.

Yeah, after the harvesting, all the season's over, we had a picnic [pre-union days]. Camp picnic goes to Kailua side--we never been to Kailua. So, it says, "Let's go." Company provide the trucks and bus like that.

WN: What about food?

MN: Some of the food, they give. But, mostly, we used to take our own lunch and eat together.

WN: So, did you know most of the people living in your camp?

MN: Yeah. In the camp, we know. And next camp, like Kemoo Camp, we knew some of them there. But, like Mrs. Taniguchi [another interviewee] like that. Those people live in Kipapa-5. We used to be together in working. So, we know.

WN: Did your camp do anything with other camps?

MN: No, I didn't hear about that. Only once in a while, I heard about the Filipino bachelors went [play] basketball to the other camp. Other than that, I didn't hear.

WN: How about holidays? How about July 4? Was there something...

MN: July 4 was the busy, busy season day, so everybody work. Everybody feel so good--we had a time and a half. (Laughs)

WN: How about things that just the Japanese community at the camps did?

MN: We had a club. Not many Japanese, you know, over there--the Kaukonahua Camp. Was a small camp. So, we had a Japanese club. But not so active. And the young boys and girls, they had their own Japanese club, too.

WN: You said your camp was a small one. Do you remember how many people lived in Kaukonahua?

MN: Oh, over there, Japanese.... I wonder how many Japanese? About 30 families, I think.

WN: And how many people, total?

MN: The whole, with the Filipinos and everything? Was around---might be around 300 to 400, I don't know. They had lots of young Japanese boys, you know. Working in Experiment [Station], and all those. [But] since the war start, they all went out for the defense job. They make good money. And they were in the Army, too.

WN: So, after the war, the camp got smaller?

MN: Yeah, smaller. And the boys didn't come back.

WN: How about things like O-bon?

MN: O-bon? No, we didn't have no O-bon program there. They all [went] out to Wahiawa.

WN: Wahiawa? So, a lot of those things, you have to go to Wahiawa for?

MN: Yeah, that's right.

WN: What about some Filipino holidays. Like Rizal Day?

MN: Filipino holidays? I didn't hear they celebrate their holidays. I didn't hear about that. (Pause) I tell you one thing. Now those things never happen no place, I think. At the camp [Kaukonahua], was a Korean field boss, you know. That was during the wartime. Field boss says, "You [people not living in the camp] cannot come in." Even the policeman cannot come in. They cannot come inside the camp. So, you know these Filipino bachelors, they don't have no activities, no nothing. They want to play dice, and all gamblings, like that. They all gather at the big boardinghouse. They play poker and hanafuda, all that kind. And the boss was smart--Korean, eh? He said, those who win, they have to put in so much to that Korean boss. That was a big money. Because every weekend, [they gambled]. And he put that all in the bank for the full year. With that money, he celebrate the Christmas party for us [the camp residents].

(Laughter)

MN: Yeah, he was a smart guy. Well, he used to call the policeman, too.

WN: So, if the policemen weren't allowed in the camp, how did you get protection? What if some trouble was in the camp?

MN: Oh, only those gamblings and like that. In the boardinghouse, it's all right. The policemen don't bother them. But [if] they have a chicken fight, the policemen come in. We had a protection, too. Because everybody used to tell us, in no other place, the policeman cannot go and catch the gamblers. (Laughs)

WN: Oh, I didn't ask you about the assigning you your home. How did

you get your certain house?

MN: You mean the camp house? Well, [at] first, we had a house in the middle of the camp. You see, that's close to the community bathroom. The boss told us---since he was our friend, "You folks better take that house because it's so convenient over there."

We says, "Okay, wherever you tell us go, we go. We stay there."

But, two, three years before the war, the man who stayed in that way down the corner camp house, he went to Japan. And he was taking care of the stable horse and everything. And they want somebody to take care that. My husband loves to take care the animal. He said, well, if the boss let him do that, he said he will take care of that. And the stable and everything. The boss says, "All right. Nobody wanted to go, so you can." So, then we moved to the other house. At least you have to get permission or okay from the boss.

WN: Was your house considered big for that camp?

MN: Oh, yeah. Little bigger than the other one. It was two-bedroom, but still little bigger than the other house.

WN: When they assign the houses to people, did they consider the size of their families? You know, like big family goes to big house?

MN: Yeah, that's what they say.

WN: You stayed at Kaukonahua until 1951.

MN: Yeah, 1951. We moved here [to her present home in Wahiawa] in 1951--September.

WN: Why didn't you move to Whitmore [in 1948, when Whitmore was built]?

MN: Well, we were planning to move there in the first part. And we asked the plantation housing department--my husband was under that. So, we asked, "Oh, we want to move to Whitmore first. Before moving here." Because that time, we already had this house. But we were fixing it. Because the tenant who was in here moved out. So we say we going to fix this house. We said, "We want to move to Whitmore. And then, after our house is all settle up, then we going to move to Wahiawa."

So the boss, Mr. [Milton] Ballengee--he was the boss of the plantation housing--he says, "Oh, Nihei, don't move to Whitmore. We going to wait until your house is ready. Why don't you make 'em in only one. Move into Whitmore, move into Wahiawa, that's too much trouble."

So, we says, "Oh, if you can do that, well, we going to wait and

move to Wahiawa." All the camp [Kaukonahua] people move out, we were the last one. The last one [to move out] was, I think, April. But we stayed until September [1951].

WN: And after you moved out, what happened to the camp?

MN: They all moved the houses to Whitmore. On the end part, where the [Helemano] school is. That's where the Kaukonahua houses was. We say, "We want to buy [a house in Whitmore]." They said, "No, those people who have houses in Wahiawa, they not selling [to them]."

WN: What differences do you see in [Wahiawa] now as compared to camp life?

MN: Well, what I think is, you live in a camp, [it's not] like living out here. Because the neighbors are so close [at camp]. They object too much. I don't like that.

WN: This is at the camps you mean?

MN: Yeah. At the Whitmore.

WN: Anything else? Any other differences?

MN: Like our friends living there, they satisfied with that. So, must be okay.

WN: When you were at Kaukonahua, were there stores or...

MN: Yeah. We had one stores. You know the Whitmore Supermarket in Whitmore? That man owned a little store in Kaukonahua. He had one store in Kemoo Camp, too.

WN: Was that his own? Was the company running that?

MN: No, no. His own, his own. You know the Councilman Matsumoto? Toraki Matsumoto? He used to work hard in that store.

WN: So that's where you got most all your groceries?

MN: Yeah. That's where I got mine.

WN: Did most of the other camps have private stores?

MN: Yeah. Most of them had. Like Brodie-2 where the loading station is now. Where the pineapple stand is. They had a camp over there. Brodie-2. Over there they had a store. You know the Wahiawa Miyashiro Market? He had a store there. Every camp had a little store.

WN: How about a post office?

MN: Post office? No. Post office, you have to come to Wahiawa. But, like I don't know other places, but [at] Kaukonahua, the office boy used to come out to Wahiawa Post Office and gather all the Kaukonahua mail. And bring it back to the camp office.

WN: How about a bank?

MN: Bank? Bank, too, we had to come out.

WN: How about churches and schools?

MN: Oh, schools. The children used to walk down [from Kaukonahua] to where that pineapple stand [is now]. There they had a Helemano School there. But first they walk [for] about one year, then, company provide the busing.

WN: And churches?

MN: There are no churches. Only once in a while, Mormon or Buddhist used to come around and preach.

WN: Where did they preach?

MN: At the clubhouse. They had a big clubhouse.

WN: Did you have any garden?

MN: Yeah. We had in the back yard. A quite big of a vegetable garden.

WN: Did most families have gardens?

MN: Yeah. It's on the gulch side. So, my husband all clean up the gulch side. We had a garden, chicken, all kinds.

WN: As you look back in your pineapple experience, what were the best and what were the worst things about your experience? First, let's take the best part.

MN: Best part? Well, in working? The best one is when you go out weeding--that's hoe-hana. Little plants about this tall [one foot high].

WN: Because, why?

MN: Because the plants are so short, no dews, no nothing. When the plants are short, it's not many weeds, you know. Because they spray that. Everything is covered with the spray. So the weeds don't grow up. So that's the best. You take your time and go back and forth.

WN: What were the worst?

MN: The worst is stripping. There's so many bad plants [slips] on the good mother plants, you knock that all off. That's the worst. Like me, I do real honest job. And I take off everything. But some of my friends, the one inside, they don't touch 'em and they just go. That makes me mad. I say, "Hey, come back. Look at you." (Laughs) Mrs. Taniguchi is like that. She's real honest. Yeah, she's real honest. Even one plant, even one, that bad ones left, she come back and take 'em off. Sometimes, we had good fun. Sometimes we had.... (Laughs) Makes you mad. (Laughs) Yeah, stripping was the worst. You don't know how much you did. They only count by the lines--rows. The boss don't know [if] we made a good job or worst or what.

WN: At the end of the day, did you feel that you accomplished something?

MN: Well, we think, "Oh, today. Eight hours gone, now I'm free." That's what I think. (Laughs) "Now, it's my time."

WN: Besides the work--you know everything, as far as the camp life and your home life, family life, what did you like the best? In everything to do with pineapple?

MN: My whole life in pineapple? What should I say? Well, when I work in the pineapple, sometime I had hard life and like that. But, I think I learned something to work in the field. Not only on the money part. Something for your life. I think I learned something. What you have to do to keep up with the other people. What you don't know, you learn from the other people. I think that's what I think I learned.

WN: Things like friends, did you meet...

MN: Yeah, some---I never know that person, [but] I met a nice guy.

WN: As you look back, [could] you say that you gained some skills?

MN: Uh huh [yes]. (Pause) I think from what I worked hard and everything, I think that's why I get the easy life now. Even now, I live on my Social Security. I still am healthy. And enjoy with the other groups and friends.

WN: Was the money that you took home from the pineapple, you know, from your work. Was that a really important part of the family budget?

MN: Oh, yeah. Because those days, even the man's pay was not much as now. With only my husband one, was not [much] after we pay all the bills and things. And my boys was going to college. Business school. And that helped a lot.

WN: So you feel that you had to work?



MN: Yeah, that's what I thought. What I thought and I did.

WN: Would you have preferred to be just a housewife?

MN: Oh, yeah. Sometime I used to think, "Oh, when I'm going to stay home? Keep up with the housework?"

WN: If there wasn't a pineapple industry in Hawaii, where do you think you would have ended up working?

MN: With me, if I---well, that I don't know. It's hard to tell.

WN: Did you think about working another at any time?

MN: Maybe, yeah. If no pineapple, I think my husband would work as a carpenter or carpenter helper. That's what he likes. I don't know where we live. Maybe in Wahiawa, town [i.e., Honolulu], or some other place. Besides the pineapple.

WN: Did you know anyone who worked in the sugar fields?

MN: Sugar fields? Because I didn't live in the sugar plantation camp. So I don't know much. Only some relatives, I know. But other than that, I don't.

WN: When you talk to people who worked, like with your relatives, how do you think your work compared to their work?

MN: Oh, I think mine is better than them. (Laughs) I say pineapple is better than them. They said, "Why?"

I said, "Yeah, look. Pineapple, while you working, you can see all the outside. Skies. And you get a nice air. But sugar cane, when you're in the tall ones--you under there--how can you see the outside?" I used to tell them.

He says, "No, not every day like that."

But, me, I used to think, "Oh, pineapple is better than sugar cane."

WN: How about people in the pineapple cannery, did you talk to anyone who worked in there?

MN: The other night, I talked with my cousin's wife. She's working at the cannery. And says, "How about now, it's slowdown? No pineapple."

She says, "No, not slowdown." She works in fresh fruit department. She says, "Oh, we have [to work] like a man."

I say, "How come?"



She says, "We have to carry the 40-pound box. Push 'em aside."  
It's a heavy job--that's man's job.

WN: How do you feel about women working in the pineapple field?

MN: It's same like me. For the financial [reason], I think they all---  
even it's a hard job, they work in the field. And now they have a  
good pay. Now they sure have good pay.

WN: Would you encourage a young lady now to work out in the fields like  
you did?

MN: No, some I tells them.... Now, most of our workers is Filipino,  
you know. No, Japanese, all they out. I tell them, "Oh, go work  
while you can get some good job, go get 'em."

WN: What do you think the future of the pineapple is? I mean, who do  
you think will be working in the fields in the next 20 years?

MN: I don't know. Japanese young boys, they not going to work in  
that---maybe, only the school children. Summertime, they going to  
work. But, not like olden days. They not going to stick to the  
pineapple. So, that means it's going to be the Filipinos, I think.

WN: You mean, immigrants?

MN: Yeah, immigrants.

WN: How do you compare today's women as compared to the women in your  
time?

MN: I think it's no difference. They sure work hard. Yeah, they sure  
work hard.

WN: What do you feel about the women's movement now? What do you feel  
about women's lib now?

MN: Compared to our olden days, we couldn't get what we like, but now,  
you can have everything what you like.

WN: Do you have any last thing to say about your impressions of pine-  
apple?

MN: Oh, I think I don't have. (Laughs) My son, living in Mililani,  
I think he saw your card there. He said, "Who's this?"

Oh, I said, "Warren Nishimoto." He comes over for all the past,  
what we did and saw. And they going to tape a record for later on.  
They going to all send to the library.

He said, "Well, when the thing is all set, first thing is, I going  
to hear." (Laughs)

WN: Would you want your grandchildren to be able to read what you said?

MN: Oh, yeah. My grandchild--he's only eight. But he's kind of bright. He say, "Grandma, can I go stay there and listen what you tell to Mr. Nishimoto?" (Laughs)

END OF INTERVIEW

**WOMEN WORKERS  
in Hawaii's  
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**Volume I**

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